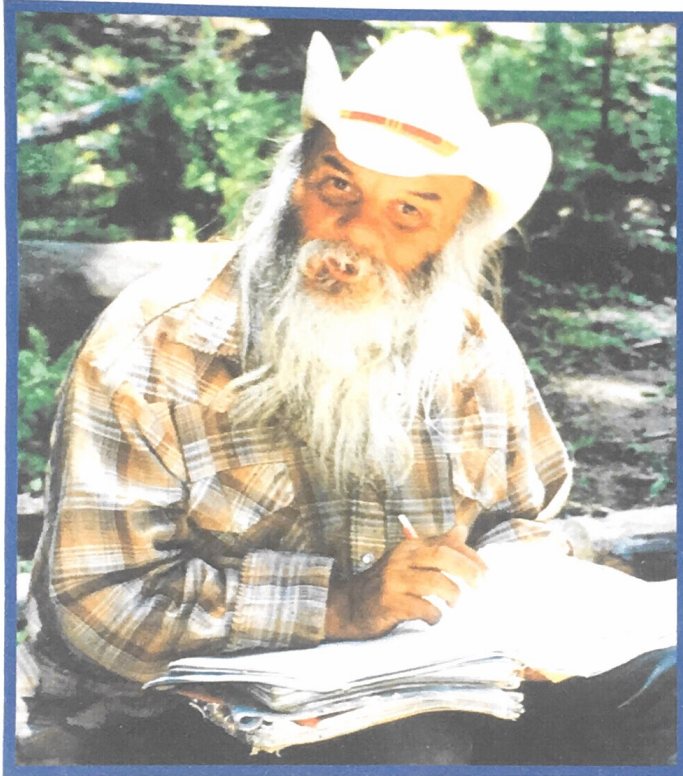




# Rainbow Family

## Life Stories



*by Jodey Bateman.  
Interviews with Rainbow  
Family of Living Light  
folks conducted between  
1977 and 2008.  
Scanned in 2018.  
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02.A Introduction by Jodey to -  
"The Rainbow Family"  
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# THE RAINBOW FAMILY

compiled by Jodey Bateman

"Democracy is a very personal thing, which  
like charity, begins at home."

from The Lost Universe

by Eugenia "Gene" Weltfish



## DEDICATION

... He held out a quart bottle of beer. But before we drank, he poured a little on the ground. "The first drink is always for the brothers and sisters who have passed on," he said. "That's a custom I have."...



# INTRODUCTION

1

③ Back in the 1920's, a young woman anthropologist, Gene Weltfish, started visiting with the Pawnee Indians in Oklahoma to learn from the old people about the life they had once lived in Nebraska in villages of earth lodges - large, dome-shaped huts covered with packed earth, each one the home of around 30 people. In 1967, she published The Lost Universe, a book where she told what relevance she felt the old way of a few thousand Pawnee Indians has to our large, complex USA. Dr. Weltfish said she found the way the Pawnees organized themselves "startling." In her words:

"They were a well-disciplined people, maintaining public order under many trying circumstances. And yet they had none of the power mechanisms that we consider essential to a well-ordered life. No orders were ever issued. No assignments for work were ever made nor were over-all plans discussed. There was no code of rules of conduct nor punishment for infraction. There were no commandments nor moralizing proverbs. The only instigator of action was the consenting person... In all his work, both public and private, the Pawnee moved on a totally voluntary basis. Whatever social forms existed were carried within the consciousness of the people, not by others who were in a position to make demands. As I talked to the old men and women I realized that this is what we wish for but do not have... I repeatedly asked when they got together and laid the plan they were apparently carrying through... The answer was always, 'They didn't discuss it at all... It goes along just as it happens to work out.'

"For example, sentinels were always needed... to keep watch for the enemy... Sentinels were neither assigned nor called for by anyone. A number of young men who were friends would be talking together and one would mention that this was about the time the enemy would be attacking. Then one of them would say, 'I think I'll go up



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to the sentry post tomorrow morning. Another would say, 'I think I'll do that too.' Then several others would chime in and word would get around and other young men would also turn up long before dawn at the different sentry posts... The plans seemed to shape themselves.

"Time after time I tried to find a case of orders given and there was none. Gradually I began to realize that democracy is a very personal thing which, like charity, begins at home. Basically it means not being coerced and having no need to coerce anyone else. The Pawnee learned this way of living in the earliest beginnings of his life. In the detailed events of everyday living as a child, he began his development as a disciplined and free man or as a woman who felt her dignity and independence to be inviolate...

"As I studied Pawnee life I often asked myself how far the power mechanisms that characterize our present social life are really indispensable. In our theory of democracy we express a profound desire for the kind of voluntarism that the Pawnee practiced. It is not easily described, for it is implicit in the individual personalities of the people themselves. Their personality pattern only too often eludes us, and only by attention to minute detail can we come to understand its special quality.

"... At this date [1967] the revolution of the underdog resounds in our streets and we are compelled to review all our values. We have no choice. The future American dream must grasp realities that are not yet here.

"For this task neither instant wisdom nor instant answers are available. The mind and the spirit is called upon to make a new kind of effort... It is through an understanding of a widely divergent human mode - another world view that I ask you to begin our quest for a new individuality - a new, self-sufficient independent personality, capable of resisting mass thoughts and mass things



and of following its own star, of shaping its own hopes and aspirations.

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"This personality must be self-sufficient but not self-enclosed, for without a free and dynamic interaction with other people it can only dry up and wither away. Such a personality cannot grow in a relationship of domination and submission. Genuine equality is its only environment. It cannot grow under pressure of the personal war we so blandly call competition. We need no longer hold lengthy debates on whether human equality is possible. It is being fought for now and it will be won. Our society will change and for the first time we will have, not theoretical, but de facto democracy. What kind of society will that be?"

-from The Lost Universe by Gene Weltfish.

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On July 3, 1975, I was sitting on a hill above the Buffalo River in Arkansas watching the first Rainbow Gathering I had ever been to. What I was seeing and the people I had talked to there made me think of the words of Gene Weltfish I have just quoted. There was a lot of purposeful activity supplying food and firewood and water for hundreds of people - all of it volunteer without any apparent central direction. Soon I could see there were leaders but even they didn't know how it was all done. I learned at later gatherings that anybody willing to work could come in off the road and take a leadership role - even if they'd never been to the gathering before.

The Rainbow Family, which puts on the gatherings, is a major social movement that developed in the Seventies. It is probably as influential among young people in the Eighties as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was in the late Sixties. SDS was mostly college youth, very publicity conscious and close to the media centers. Because SDS opposed the Vietnam war and called for revolution, the media were anxious to find out what was going on. In contrast, Rainbow has a high proportion of working class youth, many of them



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high school dropouts. They often live in small towns or rural areas, usually in the western US (though the number of Rainbow people in the East is rapidly increasing.) Very often they are always on the road. And Rainbow has no official political position to give out - simply "Come and find out." The media have not responded with much attention. Most Rainbow publicity is still by word of mouth.

The high point of Rainbow is the gathering - a combination free-form religious service, family reunion and party held in the national forests of a different state each year, centering on the first week of July. (People start showing up three months earlier and a few may stay in the area for a couple of months afterward.) One major purpose that the gatherings fulfill is to teach people the sort of self-governing group activity in daily life that the Pawnees and other Indians are said to have had.

Which brings up the question - what happens in the lives of people after the gathering? Every gathering has had the hope of finding some land where people can settle down and continue the same sort of community in freedom that they have known at the gathering. So far this has been fulfilled only on a small scale in the lives of scattered little groups. Yet Rainbow has influenced many people deeply when they leave the woods and go back to town life and jobs.

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Is it possible that some day our whole society may be like the gathering - a place where people control their work. Instead of being bossed around for someone else's profit. Can we do away with "relationships of domination and submission" and have "genuine equality?"

This has been the dream of generations of radicals in many countries. In the US before World War I, the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were the main



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forces keeping this dream alive among working class people. In the 1930's the Communist Party was the center of the hope for a world where workers control their own lives. After World War II, Communist Party influence collapsed. The Party's top-down structure was anything but liberated and the Party discredited itself by its completely uncritical support of the Soviet Union. Also Party members were kicked out of labor unions, the government bureaucracy and mass media entertainment.

As Lawrence Lipton said in The Holy Barbarians, many people in the Beat Generation of the years after World War II were children of pre-war radicals (for example, Gary Snyder's parents were in the IWW. Allen Ginsberg's mother was the head of the Communist Party of New Jersey.) Although the Beats often produced only escapism, many of them were looking for a radical life-style that might help them as individuals survive in an unliberated society. Some people in the Beat scene were peace activists in the Fifties (like Allen Ginsberg and his friends Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the parents of Garrick Beck, one of the founders of Rainbow.)

The Rainbow Family came out of the Sixties counter-culture which derived many of its customs (like pot-smoking and general hairiness) and its feeling for life from the Fifties Beats. But while all the Beats could probably not fill a large auditorium, the counter-culture to some degree involved millions of youth.

What made the difference between Fifties and Sixties? In the Sixties a younger generation grew up which included millions who did not know the hardships their parents had known. The Communists, Socialists, IWW and other radicals of the past had not made a totally new society, but they were at the center of the work of setting up strong labor unions in heavy industry, of putting pressure on the government for social security and welfare and unemployment insurance. By the Sixties young people took for granted the high wages unions had won and the various reforms



like unemployment insurance that took away fear of starvation during a business slump.

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George Orwell in his novel 1984 said that in the long run, a hierarchical society must have a base of poverty and ignorance. In the Sixties, many more young people than ever grew up with economic security and leisure and access to new ideas. They began to challenge every form of authority and hierarchy.

Young people around colleges formed protest organizations to resist the Vietnam War and struggle for equality for women and minorities. Still younger and less political youth challenged the most obvious authority that any youth must confront - their parents. Hundreds of thousands of young people voted with their feet and ran away from oppressive home situations. This was made easier because many of their parents had been divorced in the record wave of divorces in the late Forties and were on second marriages. So, many young people grew up knowing that their families had not been established for all eternity. They came to feel that families are made by the will of the people (like the US government is supposed to be) and if people didn't like one arrangement, they could find another one.

The great psychologist Wilhelm Reich said in his article "What Is Class Consciousness?" that an oppressive society trains young people to accept its institutions by raising them in home environments where they are bullied and pushed around. Reich said that when young people hear about political rebellion, at once they think of rebelling against their parents. He called on radical organizations to set up centers for runaway young people.

The radical youth organizations of the Sixties found themselves doing just that without consciously planning to. Every protest group I am familiar with had to deal with runaways (I once found a runaway boy who couldn't have been older than nine curled up on the ground trying to sleep on a November night).



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under our civil rights office in Mississippi and the runaways were not only teenagers and children. As the Vietnam war got bigger, many leftists were sheltering runaway GI's and draft dodgers. Also, for many students, dropping out of college, thus ending financial support by their parents and going on the road, was the equivalent of running away from home.

Most of the runaway youth didn't become political and often they got on the nerves of the leftists, but still the runaways kept coming and the leftists usually sheltered them. The radical student groups generally set the moral atmosphere of the college fringe communities where the runaways came. Many young people didn't understand all that the radicals were talking about and got bored with the endless left-wing speeches and debates. But the non-political youth usually respected the leftists. They believed the leftists were about to pull off some kind of miracle called a revolution that would create a totally new, free and happy society. Meanwhile leftists usually made an attempt to live the way they thought people would live in their future society and gave an example to other youth. Leftists didn't steal: therefore it wasn't cool to steal. This created an atmosphere of trust in college communities that made it possible for runaways and dropouts and drifters of all kinds to find a place to stay. (See Jane Howe's account in this book of how the Oklahoma University fringe community sheltered transients.)

The counter-culture communities of young transients began to develop in college fringe areas across the US in 1964 and 1965 along with the use of marijuana and psychedelics. When people take psychedelics, apparently the screen is lifted from their minds that has been put there by everything they have learned from authority figures. People are free to take in raw, fresh impressions from the external world and their own inner selves instead of looking at the official reality.



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The psychedelic experience has often been described by intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary. What these observers from the more well-to-do parts of society often miss is the force of psychedelics as an equalizer. In learning from psychedelics an illiterate Indian and a PhD can have equally great insights with nothing to say the PhD is going to have the greatest insight. This has considerable social implications when you consider that millions of American youth have taken psychedelics. In the words of Red Dave, a Los Angeles slum youth:

"In 1965, when I was 13 I took Owsley acid for the first time. I decided that the white world was all plastic, the houses were all plastic. Then the next day when I looked at the ground, and the ground was still breathing, I realized I was never going to be the same again. I was going to be a freak for all time.

"After taking acid, I realized that LSD was like the secret that the white world wasn't going to tell you. It revealed things in nature that the cops and the school wouldn't tell."

The San Francisco Bay area became a center for young people on the loose. It had been a major Beat Generation center (with the use of marijuana and peyote that accompanied the Beats) since the 1940's. There was a large university in Berkeley with a reputation for protest groups. A left-wing union with IWW and Communist background (the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union) had influence in local politics and created an atmosphere of tolerance for dissenting views. Also the Bay Area was in the state with the highest divorce rate in the country - which means a state full of disintegrating and patched-up families that generated runaways.

In the late Fifties and early Sixties many San Francisco State University students started renting apartments in the Haight Ashbury after their university moved to the nearby 19th street.



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campus. Soon a floating population of artists and musicians and other college fringe people moved into the neighborhood. On November 6, 1965, Bill Graham put on San Francisco's first major psychedelic rock concert, featuring the Jefferson Airplane, a Haight-Ashbury band.

The Psychedelic Shop started in the Haight on January 1, 1966. About that time an Englishman set up the first Haight-Ashbury crash pad - a shelter for whoever wished - in a deserted building. He hung a British Flag out the window and called it the British Embassy. A flow of runaway youth started. In the first six months of 1966, the San Francisco police had 8,831 contacts with juveniles, a big increase over 1965. In the same six months, 1,231 teenagers were reported as runaways in San Francisco.

According to Rowdy in this book, he was seeing runaways in Haight-Ashbury as early as 1964. Crazy John says he ran away to the Haight November 21, 1965. In January, 1966 Barry says he started staying in the British Embassy crash pad. On September 6, 1966, a feature story in the San Francisco Examiner described Barry and a group of his friends as "hippies." The word hippie was used as early as 1944 in New York City, according to The Autobiography of Malcolm X to mean a young white hanger-on of black musicians. I saw the word hippie used in a December, 1965 report by Jeff Shero, national vice-president of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to mean non-political young people, mainly interested in pot and psychedelics, who often hung around with leftists. (see post-script's section)

However, the San Francisco Examiner's story gave major publicity to the word "hippie" as an identity for all the young runaways and dropouts. The Examiner's story also made Haight-Ashbury seem like the place for hippies to be - even the origin of the whole phenomenon. Yet scenes on a smaller scale than Haight-Ashbury had been developing independently at the same time in neighborhoods known for artists and musicians like Chicago's Old Town and New York's Greenwich Village and college towns like Norman, Oklahoma, and Austin, Texas.

After the Examiner's story, more runaways than ever poured into



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Haight-Ashbury. Some people like Emmett Grogan of the Diggers tried to make sure that these young people could obtain food, clothing, medical care and jobs. But most of the people the young runaways met up with were only anxious to sell them things - dope, trinkets, tickets to musical performances. In 1967 these merchants held what amounted to an advertising campaign called the Summer of Love to attract young people to Haight-Ashbury to buy their products. As the dropouts and runaways who came to Haight ran out of money, many turned to begging, stealing or prostitution. Much of Haight-Ashbury became a hip skid row.

In 1966 as the Haight-Ashbury scene was growing, singer Lou Gottlieb tamed his 31 acres near the Bay Area called Morning Star Farm. He turned it over free for anyone to live on. A fluctuating group of about 50 hippie refugees from the decline of the Haight settled there. In 1967 Bill Wheeler opened the Ahimsa Open Land Community (known as Wheeler's Ranch) nearby which also took in refugees from Haight - 300 at the most. In this book, Nashema tells about Morning Star and Feather and her daughter Tracy talk about their lives at Wheeler's Ranch.

This was the beginning of the communes. In the next ten years, an estimated 3,000 small communities, mostly of young people, rose (and often fell) in rural areas. A wide variety of communities are covered by the word commune. In some, a group of people, often dropouts from college or careers, under the influence of counter-culture ideas, would buy a piece of land and farm it together. Less well-off people might rent or simply squat on land and support themselves by small gardens or by getting left over food from supermarket dumpsters in nearby towns. In this book, David Earl and Billy Star describe such a place called Hole in the Wall. The communes which survived and prospered were often highly structured places with a strong leader who was accepted as a spiritual teacher. For examples in